

Inspiring You to Live a Fantastic Life



KERYGMA

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Dec. 2013



**Is Your Bucket Empty?
Advent Leads Us to the Truth**

By His Eminence

Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle

**If You Remove the Fluff,
What's Christmas?**

By Bo Sanchez

Embrace the Grace of Advent

**A Nun Didn't Know
She Was a Baptized Catholic
Until She Entered the Convent**

**Former Newscaster
Is Now a Happy
Missionary**

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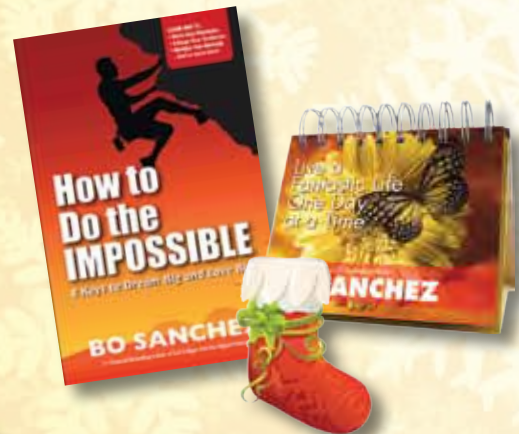
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DO YOU WANT TO BE HAPPY AND SUCCESSFUL?

Many people look for happiness in places that don't satisfy their deepest longing. Some work late into the night, working hard to earn money but still end up feeling empty inside.

We know that things give us only temporary pleasures; the happiness they give never really lasts. At the end of the day, what we accumulate would mean nothing if there are no meaningful relationships to share them with. Achieving success without loving relationships would leave us feeling lonely, isolated and empty.

But it doesn't have to be that way. Yes, you can be happy and successful at the same time. If only you knew the secret to true happiness. Do you want to know what it takes to be truly happy?

Some crucial questions to ask yourself: How many times have you thrown away a relationship for money? Or comfort? Or power? Or achievements? Have you placed your work, achievements and material things before your relationships?

Jesus showed us the way. For Him, relationships come first. He sacrificed everything that you may have life and have it to the full. He gave up His life on the Cross so that you may have yours and have it for eternity.

What is Jesus' secret? Jesus is a giver. And you should be, too, if you want to experience true happiness that's lasting, enduring and deep.

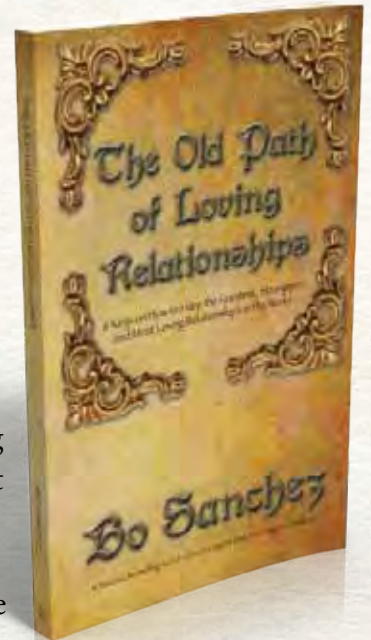
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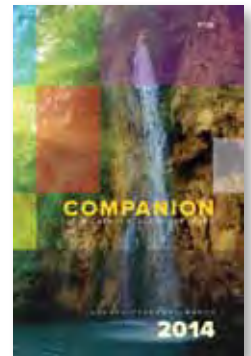
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What are you feeding your soul this year?

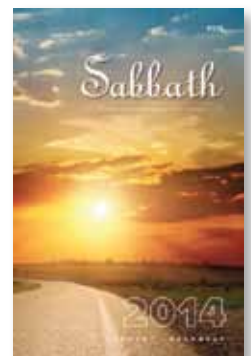
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"Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." – Matthew 4:4



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J

eremy and Josh are neighbors.

One day, Josh and his wife had to go to Europe for one week. So Josh told Jeremy, "While we're away, can you drop by our house once in a while just to check on our grandmother and our cat?"

"Sure!" Jeremy said.

But after a few days, tragedy struck. When Josh called from Europe and asked, "Jeremy, how's the cat?"

Jeremy said, "Your cat is dead."

"What?" Josh almost screamed. He was totally shocked. And he said, "Jeremy, that was too shocking for me. Don't go direct to the point. Don't say it straight. You could have beaten around the bush. You could have told me a story, like... 'The cat went up the roof of the house. And you tried to call him down. But he kept running on top of the roof. Until one roof tile got loose, and the cat fell down, and he landed right on the street where a car hit him...'"

"OK," Jeremy said.

"So, how's grandma?" Josh asked.

Jeremy said, "Uh... Grandma went up on the roof of the house..."

In a few days, we celebrate Christmas. And there's so much "beating around the bush" about Christmas. Christmas is now about *Jingle Bells* and Santa Claus and sweet ham and *quezo de bola* and *noche buena*. There's so much fluff. If you remove all the fluff, and go directly to the point, what is Christmas?

It is this...

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

— John 3:16

When I was a kid, I remember playing in our backyard. And I saw a worm. I put it in my palm. All of a sudden, I felt God speak to my heart, telling me, "Bo, can I make you a worm?"

Boy, did God have my attention! "Excuse me, Lord, but no thank You. Even if I have an extra-large nose and even if all my classmates call me *tutubi* (dragonfly), I'm very happy to be a human boy."

God repeated His message to me. "Bo, can you be a worm so that you can tell the worms how much you love them? Because if you

won't become a worm, you won't be able to speak worm language. And they wouldn't be able to understand you..."

That was when I realized God was talking about Christmas.

Christmas is about how God became Man so that we'll understand Him when He tells us, "I love you."

Many years ago, I went up a mountain to rescue eight orphans from starvation. I brought them home with me and I lived with them in a house for an entire year.

I was very busy as a preacher, writer and leader. But the moment I decided to live with them, my whole world changed. I had to sacrifice everything. Believe me, I had to disrupt my preferences, my schedule and itinerary — just to be with them. To eat breakfast with them. To play with them on the floor. To read them bedtime stories. To carry the smallest girl in my arms and tuck her to bed.

I did that because I loved them. Love pushed me to sacrifice my comfort so I could give them comfort.

On the first Christmas day, God sacrificed everything — disrupted His schedule and itinerary so He could live with us. He disrobed His divinity, stepped away from His throne, and became a helpless Infant in a dirty manger. Love pushed Him to sacrifice His comfort so that He could give us comfort.

Why?

For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son...

Merry Christmas, my dear friend.

Thank you for being a part of my life.

My life is so beautiful because of

you. 

May your dreams come true,



IF YOU REMOVE THE FLUFF

By Bo Sanchez

Thanks to Francis for agreeing to pose with his dad in this photo.



I work in a company (Breeders Agrivet Supply, Inc.) which gives out copies of Kerygma magazine every month to its branches. I'm very thankful to Kerygma that it has touched the heart of our company management. I'm very blessed as I'm one of those being inspired and healed by reading your mag.

**Janno M.
Masbate City**

I am facing many problems in my studies, family and health now. It would be very easy for me to just give up and end my life. But when I read Kerygma recently, I was enlightened. I was touched by every story featured in it, and it pushed me to go on and not give up. And I realized that God is always there to guide and love me.

Continue inspiring people like me, Kerygma.

**Janica
Naga City**

I just want to thank God because through Kerygma, my life has changed. Just yesterday I felt very weak, friendless, dirty, a sinner. For many days I was crying because I wanted to end my life, but last night, I cried out to God: "I need You to rescue me!"

When I opened my father's drawer looking for a phone charger, I saw Kerygma magazine and it made me feel that God answered my prayer when I read its theme: "The Hidden Battle."

Now I am renewed by His love. I just allow Him to love me.

**Lina M.
Quezon City**

I am an avid fan of your great magazine. I never missed a single issue since I began reading it. I always make sure to buy it at National Bookstore.

I was awed by the testimony of an anonymous girl in your August issue. Kudos to her courage and for trying hard to overcome her weakness. It only shows how patient and merciful our God is.

**Cristina
Iloilo City**

I am so blessed to read the article "Victory Is an Inside Job (Fight Your Temptations from Within)" by Bo Sanchez in Kerygma's July 2013 issue. It inspired me to love and value myself more.

Thank you, Kerygma. Keep inspiring us.

**JC
Davao City**

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**May Jesus, the real reason
for Christmas, live forever
in your hearts.
Merry Christmas!**

From the Kerygma Staff





The Momentum of Grace

Don't underestimate the power of small actions

By Rissa Singson-Kawpeng

It starts with a little nudge. A step maybe. Or a strong wind. A tiny force that sends a still object into motion. It starts slow, then picks up speed. And before you know it, the snowy face of a mountain is careening down the slopes. It's an avalanche!

This is what it means to gain momentum.

Bishop Raul Martirez from Christ the King parish recently mentioned this concept and it's been churning in my mind. On the Memorial of the Beheading of John the Baptist, he said that our actions start a momentum of events that may lead to good or bad.

We know the story of how John the Baptist was decapitated (Mark 6:17-29). King Herod married Herodias, the wife of his brother, Philip. This union was against God's law (Leviticus 20:21) and John didn't hesitate to call sin a sin. That infuriated Herodias and she nursed a grudge against the prophet.

One day, Herodias had her chance to get back at John. Her daughter danced for the king's birthday and he was so pleased that he promised the girl she could have anything she wanted — even half of his kingdom. So the girl consulted her mom and Herodias told her, "Ask for the head of John the Baptist."

And that's what she got on a platter. What started as a grudge set the momentum that resulted in murder.

Think about it: Herodias could have asked for anything she could imagine. Half of the kingdom. A castle on a hill. Royal robes and jewelry. A decree proclaiming her daughter to be the fairest of all in the land. Instead, she wasted the opportunity of a lifetime to satisfy her lust for revenge.

Vengeance, hatred and resentment are like that. They eat us up and consume us, depriving us of the ability to enjoy the good things laid out before us.

But if a wrong action can set us careening down the path of perdition, so can a small step towards God. I call this the *momentum of grace*.


We decide to forgive and grace takes over to remove the anger from our hearts.

We desire to serve more and grace presents us with a call to be part of a ministry.

Grace takes us farther and faster than we could ever reach on our own. It builds upon our feeble, imperfect resolve to follow the Lord and turns it into a powerful testimony that changes lives.

While grace gives us momentum, sin stalls us. It puts obstacles on our path to holiness. It creates friction so that we tire of doing the good and the right. It causes us to remain stuck in our anger, fear or hopelessness. I call this the *inertia of sin*.

Thank God the momentum of grace trumped the inertia of sin.

When a frail but perfect Baby was born on that first Christmas eve, it set off a momentum that became an avalanche of salvation for you and me. 

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Email me at justbreatherissa@gmail.com, subscribe to my Facebook updates, or visit my website www.rissasingsonkawpeng.com.

What to Expect This Month:

Get ahead of the Christmas rush with these gift ideas that will surely bless:

For kids: *The Adventures of Toby Squint and Leon* comic book

For singles: *Love Handles: Get a Grip on Finding and Dating Your Lifetime Love* by Rissa Singson Kawpeng

For parents: *Lasting Gifts You Can Give to Your Children* by Arun Gogna

For anyone and everyone: *Didache, Sabbath, Companion* and *Gabay* reflection guides, now available in ebook format!

Bo Sanchez's newest book entitled *The Abundance Formula (The Four Simple Steps That Make Good People Rich)*.

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ABOUT OUR COVER MODEL

Camille Beatriz Co is what you might call a Light of Jesus baby. Her parents, Eduard and Olive Co, who became members of LOJ in 1993, often brought her to prayer meetings when she was still a kid. As she was growing up, her community exposure impacted her life — how she sees the world, how she makes decisions, how she handles the other aspects of her life, and not just the spiritual side.

When she turned 16, she officially became a servant at The Feast PICC's Warmth Ministry as an usherette. (The Feast is the Light of Jesus Family's weekly gathering that happens in many venues. Check out www.lightfam.com for schedules.) She also serves as a commentator/lector under the Liturgy Ministry. Being an usherette teaches her how to be humble, assertive and at the same time diplomatic. As a commentator/lector, she gains extra self-confidence, as well as how to be calm, cool and collected in front of a big audience.

Camille, a 2013 graduate of International Studies from De La Salle University, dreams of becoming a successful entrepreneur someday. She aims to become a representative of the Philippines to the United Nations and engage in humanitarian and civil rights endeavors.

But as she waits for her dreams to come true, she educates herself on these fields and works hard to stay focused on her goals. Likewise, she tries to look for experiences that will lead her to her goals.



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Kerygma. A Greek word meaning Proclamation of the Gospel. It is a Catholic inspirational magazine. It aims to be an evangelistic tool to all nations, providing Scriptural, practical and orthodox teachings to Catholics, particularly those in the Catholic Renewal, as an alternative to present-day magazines. It is also committed to fostering the renewal and unity of the whole Christian people. Philippine copyright Shepherd's Voice Publications, Inc. 2013. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without permission. Kerygma is published monthly by Shepherd's Voice Publications, Inc., whose editorial and business offices are located at 60 Chicago St., Cubao, 1109 Quezon City. Tel. Nos.: (632) 725-9999, 411-7874, 725-1190. Fax: 727-5615 Email: editsvp@shepherdsvoice.com.ph. Website: www.shepherdsvoice.com.ph



THE ART OF RECYCLING GIFTS

Have you ever experienced receiving the same gift item, one that you already have or something you don't really need? Recycling gifts or "regifting" has become socially acceptable in the recent years. It means giving a gift you don't need to someone who can use it, actually needs it, and simply will enjoy the gift.

Here are some valuable tips to consider in regifting items you will receive this holiday season:

1. **Regift only new items.** If you receive a gift that is not right for you but you know would be perfect for another friend or relative, regifting can be the right thing to do. You will feel happier knowing that the gift has gone where it will be truly appreciated and the recipient will be delighted by your thoughtfulness.
2. **Match the right gift to the right person.** If the item is a piece of clothing in the wrong size, then match it up with a friend. If you do not think your gift will fit someone you know, consider donating it to charity. Toys, clothes and household items may be useful to those who need it the most.
3. **Personalize regifted items.** One of the fun ways to regift is to personalize the gifts you intend to regift. For instance, chocolates and wine can be placed in a great vintage basket with a lovely ribbon and turned into a gift basket for a friend's wedding anniversary in January.

Additional Tips: To avoid embarrassment, don't regift within the same social group. If you receive a gift at the office, don't regift it to another coworker. The same goes for your family, school friends and community. Also consider holding a white elephant activity where participants can bring gift items they don't need but can be used and appreciated by someone else.

Source: <http://voices.yahoo.com>



GREEN WRAP YOUR GIFTS

The holiday season generates 25 percent more paper waste than any time of the year. While we keep our house neat, let's not forget to keep our bigger home — Mother Earth — clean as well. Keeping the environment in mind this Christmas season, here are some eco-friendly gift wrapping ideas you can do.

1. **Reuse.** It's time to use the wrapping paper, bows, ribbons and boxes you've kept from last year. If you've opened some presents, you can use the wrappers to wrap other gifts. Turn a simple brown gift bag into a gift wrapper by putting interesting quotes on it with a marker or paint. Even stenciled holiday decorations or hand paintings add a unique and personal touch.
2. **Use other items.** Use gift bags instead of wrapping paper since they are sturdier and not easily torn apart. Use also eco-friendly shopping bags and add some creativity. Reuse comics from newspapers to wrap your gift and give your recipient a hearty laugh before opening the gift.
3. **Make the wrapping a part of the gift.** Use cloth bags to wrap gifts beautifully. The fabric can also be part of the gift like a scarf. A bucket or watering pail can be used and filled with gardening supplies. A mixing bowl or pot makes the perfect package for your favorite cook. You can use a cute baby blanket to wrap baby stuff, all tied with a pink or blue ribbon. Gift baskets are great to use, too, and can be recycled in a myriad of ways after the holidays.

Source: <http://www.mnn.com>

Grapes, which belong to the berry family, are classified as a low glycemic index food. Better blood sugar balance, better insulin regulation, and increased insulin sensitivity have been connected with the intake of grape juices, grape extracts, and individual phytonutrients found in grapes.

Several grape phytonutrients are believed to play a role in longevity. On top of the list is resveratrol, a stilbene phytonutrient present mostly in grape skins, but also in grape seeds and grape flesh. When you include grapes among your daily fruit servings, treat one cup as the equivalent of approximately 15-20 grapes.

Source: <http://www.whfoods.com>

Quick Health Tip

GRAPES





CARDINAL TAGLE IS PASTOR OF HIS TITULAR CHURCH IN ROME

His Eminence, Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle, is “Pastor” of his titular church, the San Felice da Cantalice a Centocelle in Rome, Italy.

To include the Cardinals in the Diocesan Clergy of Rome, every Cardinal in the Catholic Church is traditionally assigned a titular church in Rome.

Cardinal Tagle is expected to give advice and support to his titular church although he

is not directly involved in its administration. He has held the church and title since November 24, 2012 when he was installed by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI into the College of Cardinals. But he was formally named “Pastor” of his titular church on June 15, 2013. The formal ceremony started with Cardinal Tagle being welcomed at the door by the priest of the church who presented him with a cross. Cardinal



Tagle kissed the cross, sprinkled holy water on the people, then led a moment of silent prayer. He then celebrated his first Holy Mass at his titular church.

The Church of San Felice da Cantalice was established on March 29, 1935 and recognized on October 17, 1935 by the Holy See. It is administered by the Order of the Friars of Capuchin and assisted by several religious congregations. It was endorsed by Pope Paul VI on April 30, 1969, and made a titular church for cardinals.

While Cardinal Tagle is titular pastor of the Church of San Felice da Cantalice, he also serves as Archbishop of Manila.

Source: <http://www.tempo.com.ph>

SAN PEDRO CALUNGSOD, BATANG MARTIR: SHOWING AT THE MANILA FILM FEST

A film that will inspire the Filipino youth is showing at the Manila Film Festival this December. *San Pedro Calungsod, Batang Martir* will increase awareness on the life of the young Filipino saint who was martyred in the name of the Christian faith.

The result of two years of research by De La Salle University History-Political Science graduate, Francis Villacorta, the film will show how the young soldier of Jesus Christ fought for the conversion of the Chamorro natives to Christianity, and his obedience and loyalty to his Mission Superior, Fr. Diego de San Vitores.



The film reveals the valuable role he played in the San Diego Mission to the Marianas Islands (Guam) between 1668 and 1672. It shows what virtues he practiced to serve the propagation of

Christianity at a time of paganism, doubt and disbelief.

“Young people today can learn a lot from the heroic life of San Pedro Calungsod. Ordinary as he was, being a young catechist and mission assistant, his dedication to his work and his devotion to God is all too inspiring,” the writer-director shared.

“His longing for his biological father back home in the Visayas will eventually be overcome by his longing for Jesus Christ. What a fascinating study of a young life all too willingly given up for the love of our Savior. Because in the end, I believe, our lives on earth is all a preparation for our reunion with Him, our Creator,” he said.

San Pedro Calungsod, Batang Martir was produced by HPI Synergy Group in association with Wings Entertainment. The film stars Rocco Nacino as Pedro, among a cast of a hundred actors. The Metro Manila Film Festival starts on December 25.

St. Nicholas

Born and Died: March 15, 270, Patara, Asia Minor – December 6, 343, Myra, Lycia

St. Nicholas was known for his piety, zeal and miracles when he became Bishop of Myra in Turkey. One day, he helped a family who lived in extreme poverty whose father, unable to support his three daughters who could not find husbands, was determined to give them over to prostitution. Learning about this, St. Nicholas, under the cover of darkness, took a bag of gold and threw it into the window of the poor family’s house. It was to be used as dowry for the eldest daughter who was soon married. He did the same for the other daughters.

The holy bishop died in 350 but his kindness and generosity became popular worldwide. St. Nicholas symbolizes the true meaning of Christmas, that of love and generosity for all the poor of the world whom Jesus Christ embraced when He himself was born poor in a manger .

Sources: *A Year with the Saints* (Don Bosco Press); <http://www.catholic.org>

Saints at a Glance



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Jason and Crystalina Evert go around the globe for their advocacy.



In the News

Parents' Role: Teaching and Practicing Chastity

By Bella Estrella

Photo by Osy Erica

Anationwide survey conducted in 2008 by the Kaiser Family Foundation in the U.S. revealed that sexual health issues, such as STDs, HIV/AIDS, and unintended pregnancy pose a big concern to young people. Four out of five adolescents (ages 15-17) and young adults (ages 18-24), including 79 percent of those who do not actively engage in sex, are personally concerned about the health issues effected by sexual activities.¹

In 2005, the same group found that peer pressure is a factor that pushes both girls and boys to have sex, thus a rise in teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.² Another study by Kaiser Family Foundation found that teens believe that their sexual decisions are influenced by media.³

The youth need love, understanding and guidance.

Jason and Crystalina Evert, an American couple who devote themselves to the enlightenment of people about the beauty of chastity, have been traveling worldwide to reach out to as many as they can. They founded Chastity Project, a ministry based in Pennsylvania that focuses on promoting purity. They have produced a number of books, booklets, CDs and DVDs that touch on topics such as lasting marriage, romance without regret, dating and sexual purity, God's plan for human sexuality, the difference between love and lust, the primary role of parents on their children's sexual behavior, and the power of prayer.

Educating Kids in Love and Chastity

On September 7, 2013, the Everts addressed hundreds of parents in a three-hour talk to guide them in achieving their primary function of educating and influencing their children to have a chaste life. The seminar, held at the University of Makati auditorium, was organized by EDUCHILD (Education for the Upbringing of Children), a nonprofit organization comprised of parents who aim to help other parents raise good families.

Jason Evert emphasized that to transmit the message of chastity to children, the parents themselves must practice it in their marriage. Chastity does not mean abstinence in

marriage. Abstinence means no sex while chastity means using the gift of sex according to God's plan in our life.

How can a parent compete with media, Internet porn and other influences that lure young people away from a pure life?

As the primary sex educators of their children, parents must communicate with their children to understand and teach them, and to show a good example of their own interior life. Explain to them the purpose of dating. Help them to think how far is too far. Boys must be taught to love, to be gentlemen, and to know that women are not objects.

Mothers can sometimes have their own hangups about sex. If they cannot talk to their children about sex, at least they can put materials around the house, such as books that speak of chastity and other subjects that can help them get enlightenment.

The parents' unconditional love is the biggest weapon in helping children. Love can give them affirmation and physical affection. Everyone needs a healthy loving touch. If children don't experience this at home, they'll look for love from someone else.


Jason also advised parents to check covenanteyes.com, an Internet filtering and accountability website that they can use to filter Internet content not appropriate to the age of their children.

Prayer Is a Most Important Tool

Themselves parents to five children, the Everts say that prayer is a most powerful tool in leading children toward a pure life. Crystalina said that training children at a young age to pray every day is something that kids will never forget even as they grow up. Teaching them to go to Jesus in the Eucharist and in the adoration chapel will help them speak to Jesus anytime.

God Wants to Love Us Where We Are

It is not right to tell kids that they can come to God only when they are perfect. The truth is, God loves us where we are right now — in our brokenness, in our sin, in our addiction.

In the quest for a chaste life, God is calling everyone to come to Him. We can raise our bowed down heads and remove our shame because there is always hope. He is the Way. He is Powerful. In Him, we can become pure and chaste. 

Sources:

¹<http://kaiserfamilyfoundation.files.wordpress.com>

²<http://www.psychologytoday.com>

³<http://depts.washington.edu/thmedia>



How Can I Confess When I'm at Sea?

I'm a seafarer and I feel very guilty for having committed a mortal sin. I want to confess my sins to a priest but I am at sea. I want to receive the sacrament of reconciliation when given the chance. What can I do while I'm still onboard? Please pray for me.

Lost at Sea

Dear Lost at Sea,

I understand your concern and feeling of helplessness about your need for the sacrament of reconciliation. You are not alone in this situation. One of the things we need to remember is that we have a merciful God who is reasonable and understands such situations. I am sure that God's judgment is not hanging over your head like a guillotine, ready to drop.

If you are sincere in your desire to repent, then God accepts your repentance and forgives you. All you need to do, other than that act of repentance, is avail yourself of the sacrament of reconciliation the next time an opportunity arises — probably the next time you are at port and able to find a local Catholic church.

One of the signs of authentic repentance is acting on the desire to grow in holiness by avoiding that sin and the temptation to commit that sin in the future. I therefore encourage you to pray daily and reflect on the Scriptures with this goal in mind. It is important that you do not neglect your spiritual life because of this experience. Perhaps the only way to overcome your feeling of guilt is to double your efforts and commitment to your relationship with Jesus. It is the experience of the presence of Jesus in your life that will help you avoid that sin in the future.

I will remember you in my Masses.

Fr. Steven Tynan, MGL



Email your questions to editsvp@shepherdsvoice.com.ph. Or if you need to talk to someone, call (632) 726-4709 or 726-6728 to contact a Light of Jesus Pastoral Care Center counselor. Pastoral counseling by telephone is 24 hours from Monday to Friday, and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays. Face-to-face pastoral counseling is by appointment. For correspondence pastoral counseling, email lojcounseling@yahoo.com or go to www.kerygmfamily.com.

Or Call **(632) 725-9999**

Pregnant? Confused? Abortion is not the answer. Contact Grace to Be Born at 0917-816-4700 or email reylindo.ortega@gmail.com. You may also contact Pro-life Philippines at (632) 733-7027.

Fr. Steve Tynan, MGL, is the spiritual director of the Light of Jesus Family and the Elim Communities. Fun-loving and ever ready for anything, this Australian cleric is presently the parish priest of St. Benedict's Parish in Don Enrique Heights in Quezon City.



My Husband Had an *Affair with a Prostitute*

Please help me pray. My husband cheated on me with a prostitute. I want to forgive, much more to forget, but the pain lingers. I still find myself crying. I'm so afraid he'll do it again. Every time I close my eyes, it plays in my mind like a slideshow. And even if my husband promised me it won't happen again, I'm still afraid that he will do it again. I want to forget what happened but it's not easy to forget it. Thank you for your prayers.

Paranoid Wife

Dear Paranoid Wife,

I have very limited information about you, your husband, and your circumstances and, at best, I can only surmise.

I can only think of the following reasons why men who have wives to have sex with still spend money for more sexual activity: 1) their sexual appetite is not satisfied in the marital bed; 2) their libido is abnormally high or they engage in other sexual sins, like pornography, which intensify their sexual need — side by side with a lack of fear of the Lord or moral values; 3) they may be suffering from a sexual disorder bordering on mania. Of course, this does not rule out other possibilities, such as the woman tempted him, friends dared him, or was in a situation that he couldn't resist.

Right now, my concern is about your woundedness as a wife. You're right about wanting to forgive because forgiveness is really the best route to healing, but it is not easy. We need the Lord to help us. It helps to acknowledge the hurt of betrayal. Don't deny nor rationalize it. Accept it's there. Usually from hurt comes anger, or almost at the same time with some people. When you recognize it in you, acknowledge that, too, and refrain from destructive actions coming from your anger which you will only regret later. One constructive response is to require a medical clearance from your husband that he did not contract any sexual disease from the prostitute before allowing him to have sex with you again. It's for self-protection and also a way of reminding him that what he did was below your standard as a wife.

Ask the Lord to help you forgive your husband. It may take a while, but the sooner you are able to forgive, the better for you. The Lord asks us to forgive not because He's on the side of our oppressor but because He knows it will give us the inner peace and joy that we need to be a happy person.

I also suggest you go for counseling. It's difficult to handle this alone. Later on, you can move on to marital counseling and, together with your husband, look into areas of your marriage that would prevent him from doing this again.

And yes, I'll include you in my prayers.

Cristy Galang

Cristy Galang has been serving San Nicolas de Tolentino Parish for the past 10 years, building Basic Ecclesial Communities in the parish and doing catechetical work. She is a licensed guidance counselor and a certified counseling psychologist. She was one of the pioneers of the Light of Jesus Pastoral Care Center.





Dra. Ella has fully embraced her mission of serving the poor of Abra.

From Pag-asa ng Pamilya: A New Doctor for Abra

By Rey Ortega

Dra. Ella during her oath-taking as a new doctor.

Please, Rey, help Ella go on with her medical studies. The poor of Abra needs a doctor."

This plea took place during a two-hour lunch in the vicinity of the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes in France sometime in August 2004.

My late wife, Myrna, and I were then in the middle of a pilgrimage when a Scottish lady named Suzie Younger invited us for lunch and made that request. Suzie was the head of Auxiliaries of the Apostolate with chapters in Abra and other Philippine dioceses.

When we returned to the Philippines, I met with Severina "Ella" Ortega and promptly made her as a scholar of Pag-asa ng Pamilya Scholarship Foundation (formerly Alay Foundation).

Nine years later, on August 27, 2013, Ella passed the August medical board exams. The Diocese of Abra now has its first and only no-fee charging doctor of medicine, caring for the poorest of the poor.

Her Journey to Becoming a Doctor

Asked why she wanted to become a doctor, Ella simply said, "I really didn't want to be a doctor, but our bishop told me to study Medicine as the diocese has no doctor for the poor. Being a member of Auxiliaries of the Apostolate and serving as a registered nurse in the diocesan healthcare ministry, I had to obey the bishop. So I went back to school!"

The late Bishop Artemio Rillera of Abra at that time wanted to revive the defunct Sta. Monica Hospital previously operated by the diocese. The hospital, catering mainly to the poor, closed down due to bankruptcy.

Ella obeyed her bishop by enrolling at the University of Northern Philippines in Vigan, Ilocos Sur in 2003.

It was a tough and challenging journey, twice interrupted by her stints as a paramedical volunteer in Our Lady of Lourdes Shrine in France in 2009 and 2012.

Despite studying to become a traditional doctor of medicine, she became attracted to the benefits offered by alternative medicine and natural healing. Her faith in natural healing was further bolstered when she attended Bo Sanchez's seminar on natural healing in Mandaluyong in February 2012.

Ella's Dreams for Her Practice and Her Poor Patients

Ella plans to supplement her Western-oriented practice of medicine with alternative medicine, holistic healing and wellness in all areas of


one's life (including spiritual, moral and social, and not just physical) that she learned from Bo Sanchez.

She also dreams of putting up a wholesale pharmacy in Bangued to supply the medicine needs of the various Botikang Parokya in Abra. "I believe there is much I can do to bring down the prices of medicines there. Imagine, a paracetamol selling for only P12 in Manila is being sold for as much as P60 to P65 in Abra. The poor cannot afford that!"

Ella's deep-seated love for God and for the poor has its roots in her family. A close look at her family reveals an amazing, truly incredible God-centered Tinguian family.

Her Tinguian parents were both farmers, used to working in their ricefield before the sun rises and coming home way past sunset. But on Sundays and holidays of obligation, all work stopped. Her late *Ammang* (father) served as pastoral leader in Lacub, a town so remote high up in the mountains, and brought Holy Communion to the laity. Her late *Innang* (mother) was an active member/officer of Apostolado ng Panalangin. Both parents instilled the love of God and love for the poor in the hearts of their children. And the seeds yielded an abundant harvest.

Ella's older brother became Rev. Fr. Cirilo Ortega, SVD, now the president of Divine Word College of Vigan, Ilocos Sur. Another brother became Rev. Fr. Liberato Ortega, currently serving as the rector of San Pablo Seminary in Baguio. Her elder sister became Sr. Daria Ortega, DDZ, who was assigned in Rome, Italy for almost 20 years. Another elder sister is Celia Ortega, who served as active member of Auxiliaries of the Apostolate and was assigned in the Nunciature in Uganda, Africa. Their youngest sibling became Atty. Marcel Ortega, currently serving as the prosecuting fiscal of Bangued.

And now, add the name of Dr. Severina Ortega to that amazing God-centered Tinguian farming family that loves the poor of Abra. 

Sponsoring a poor scholar may mean changing the life of an entire poor community. Help Pag-asa ng Pamilya Foundation send poor students to school. Contact Rey Ortega at 0922-859-7035 or email him at reylindo.ortega@gmail.com. Or deposit your donation directly to Pag-asa's bank account: Banco de Oro S/A 397-005-9458.



Feast Snapshots



JT Goes to Alabang Town Center

Text by **Osy Erica**
Photos by **IC de Guzman**

JT as in Justin Timberlake?! That would have been a wish come true. But no, our favorite guy from N'Sync wasn't at Alabang Town Center last September. A different JT was in the house: Juan Tamad, that is. The famous Pinoy folklore character took center stage during Talk 4 of the Original Pinoy Magnificence Series entitled "Pagtiwala vs. Bahala Na" at the Feast Alabang Town Center (FATC).

Launched last August 25, FATC is the newest Feast established in the southern area of the metro. And staying true to the elements that make The Feast the happiest place on Earth, lively worship followed by a powerful talk inspired the attendees.

Niko Capucion showcased his gift for music and praise as he led everyone in worship. FATC builder Mike Viñas then explained the "Bahala Na" attitude most Pinoyes have and how it relates to trust in God. Mike

elaborated that the Juan Tamad mindset should not be a license for us to be sloppy — to not take responsibility — in achieving our dreams. Instead, we must surrender in joy to God everything that is beyond our control. Completely trusting in God means asking and acting in faith — allowing God to work but having a bias for action as well. In due season, God's work will be revealed, the miracles we have been waiting for will come true, and that big blessing will finally fall from the sky (unlike the fruit Juan Tamad has lazily waited to fall from the tree).

So don't be a Juan Tamad! Take charge of your life with God as your guide.

And your first step on doing that?

Head on over to Feast Alabang Town Center — and experience life like no other. [LK](#)

The Feast Alabang Town Center happens every Sunday, 9:45 a.m., at Cinema 2, Alabang Town Center, Alabang, Muntinlupa City.



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I Ordered My Future Yesterday

By Julie Cox

(Editor's Note: This article is based on Julie Cox's book with the same title.)



S

hoeless Julie," that's how my classmates called me when I was in grade school. I had no books and sometimes no pencil or paper — and most of the time with no slippers or shoes. My stomach often ached for even the smallest morsel of food.

Food was always more important to my family than education, and as far as my father was concerned, as long as I knew how to read and write, that was enough. But my mother, despite being always tired from endless chores, would always scrounge and provide money for my school necessities.

These situations left an indelible mark in my consciousness and made me vow to myself: one, that I would never get married; and two, that I would never ever forget the poor children who have no shoes, and to help those who can't afford school supplies.

In the Beginning

I was the ninth of 12 children born to a carpenter father and a traditional Filipina subservient mother. We were like a small army and my mother did everything humanly possible to take care of us. She did all the housework manually — laundry, cooking by firewood, even fetching water from the well, which took forever and a day.

My father would go out to buy lumber and other materials for his house-building contracts and would not come home for days on end. Later on, I learned that he would gamble all the money he earned until there was no more left for his bus fare. When he did come home, he would work until the wee hours to pay off his gambling debts and had very little left for food and basic necessities. Despite this compulsion, I remember my father as a kind and generous man.

Meanwhile, all my older brothers and sisters capable of working left for Manila to help support my mother and us younger siblings. The sad part was, although my older brothers and sisters were smart academically, none of them went past grade six. During those years, I prayed to God and wished upon a shooting star that some stroke of good luck would happen so that we could somehow get out of poverty.

Despite all the hardships, I made it through graduation with honors. It was one of the happiest moments of my life — when my mother walked up the stage with me and pinned a ribbon of honor upon me. At that particular moment, I knew what I wanted to do — to write and to take lovely pictures of beautiful places in the world.

Little did I know that I would have the opportunities later in life to learn photography and carry out my own writing projects. In fact, I have published my own book, *I Ordered My Future Yesterday*, where I share my life story.

My Bout with Leukemia

A major disappointment broke my heart to pieces after my sixth-grade graduation. My parents told me that I would not be able to continue my schooling for lack of funds. I cried for weeks, especially when I saw

my classmates go to school every day. I got mad that God made us poor.

After a year, one of my brothers brought me to Manila and got me a job at a hosiery mill. At the same time, I was also his housekeeper-babysitter. I was over-fatigued all the time. I would pass out constantly. When my brother took me to a hospital, my diagnosis was summed up in one word: “fatal.”

The doctors told me that I had something called leukemia and that I was going to die. But God didn't let me die — because He has big plans for me. As Jeremiah 29:11 says: “I alone know the plans I have for you. Plans to bring you prosperity and not disaster; plans to bring about the future that you hope for.”

My family decided to bring me to a “faith healer” but after a month of taking the herbal medication, my skin turned yellow. At that point, I resigned it all to my fate. I thought, “Now I am really going to die.”

My parents summoned the faith healer again. When he saw me, he said that a miracle had just occurred and that I was cured of my blood disorder. But because I was anemic and very weak, he said I was susceptible to infection. I was brought to another doctor who treated me of my infections.

A Glimpse of Hope for My Family

After my recovery from leukemia and infections, God gave me an opportunity to save my family from financial hardship. Someone from Manila was looking for a suitable nanny-governess to three young daughters of a doctor-couple residing in the United States. I was the first person from the whole barrio to go to America during that time.

On my third year with the family, I felt homesick. I was doing the same thing seven days a week with no meaningful activities to ease my homesickness. I lost my focus on my dreams. I continued to pray to God to give me back my hope, but my loneliness clouded my reasoning, so I decided to end my life. I took a massive dose of sleeping pills from my boss's sample boxes. I slashed my left wrist with a blade and was bleeding on top of a waste can. But God again intervened and did not let me die. My employers were frantic to save me, and thank God they were both in the profession of saving lives.

Living at the Garbage Dump

When I returned to the Philippines after five years, I found out that there was very little money left from all my savings that I sent my brother to start up a business that I could return to. It was tied up in the beer garden business. We sold it, and with the proceeds I started a small bakeshop. Although I was working very hard and putting in long hours, I was not making any profit.

My brother introduced to me a friend of his who was a good baker. He was a big help and became my friend. One day, he suggested that we took a day off somewhere in Subic. I agreed because I thought he was trustworthy. It turned out to be the beginning of more misfortunes. When we arrived at our destination, it was already getting dark so I asked him to take me back home. He became angry and said there was no way we could go back that night, as there was no more transportation to Manila at that time, and we ran the possibility of getting arrested since this was during the Martial Law era and curfew was enforced.

He convinced me to spend the night in a cheap motel, promising that we would leave for Manila first thing in the morning. I agreed because I did not have any choice. The unthinkable happened as he walked me to my room. He did not leave and he forced himself on me. He was a monster disguised as a lamb. The rape was all planned. He even had a hideout where I was virtually a prisoner for the next two months. When he discovered I could be pregnant, he beat me up severely, hoping I would have a miscarriage. When he left to buy some food one day, I escaped.

I found a couple living not too far away from where I was imprisoned. They took me to another couple living near the garbage dump at the US Subic Naval base. I stayed there for almost two years. The squalor and



Julie with her husband, Lou,
God's perfect gift for her.



Julie with her son, Armand Joey, enjoying a precious time together.



Julie has not forgotten her vow to help poor children. This photo was taken after a feeding mission at Jalajala, Rizal.

horrible living conditions made my son and me sick.

I felt dead and neglected by God up in the mountains, so I went to my older sister's place in Manila. It was hard to make ends meet.

One day, out of agony, I went to a church in the city and decided to go to confession. I just started crying my heart out. The confessor, an American priest, instructed me to go the rectory and talk to him in person. Hearing my story, he told me that God won't punish good people, but that like Job I had been given many challenges. They were not meant to punish me, but to share His cross with me and to see the "light." He told me to forgive in order to lighten the burden of my heart. The priest showed me the heart of the Lord. That moment I felt my spirit lifted by many angels. I went home lighthearted. I learned to finally forgive my brother, who had squandered my savings and introduced me to his friend who had evil intentions on me.

Although our situation did not change, my attitude toward God changed. I found a personal relationship with Him. I began to meditate prayerfully for all good things to come according to His timetable. I completely relied on Him for the strength to overcome my struggles and, when there were days when I couldn't go on, I just thought of how He was nailed on the cross through no fault of His own.

I began to see light at the end of my tunnel. I started thinking about giving up my son for adoption.

I wrote my former employers in Pennsylvania and asked them to tell Carol, my friend there, of my hardship and situation with my son. I was surprised when Carol replied and offered to adopt my son, promising that should I go back to the United States, I would never be denied the chance of knowing him as he grew up.

I consulted my family and although they discouraged me from doing it, I went ahead. In no time, Carol came to the Philippines and the adoption proceedings started. It took six months before the court order was given to formally allow Carol to adopt my son. I cried buckets of tears when it happened.

Going Back to the United States

I found an employer to bring me back to America to work as their babysitter-housekeeper in New Jersey. I was allowed to take on additional jobs after housekeeping. I worked at a deli for a few hours a day and did babysitting for my next-door neighbors' daughters overnight. I was also recruited to work in an upscale Italian-American restaurant. Every day I would go to the bank with all the tips I made.

All the while, I never forgot my parents and my siblings. I took care of my parents financially, especially when they got ill. Later, I decided to work in a nursing home as a nurse's aid and had the opportunity to invest while working for a department store. I also sewed clothes and did alteration on the side.

Meeting My Future Husband

What I witnessed in my parents' marriage made me totally not interested in any man at all. I thought I would never fall in love. My horrendous experiences with men left me traumatized and, for a long time, I had nightmares.

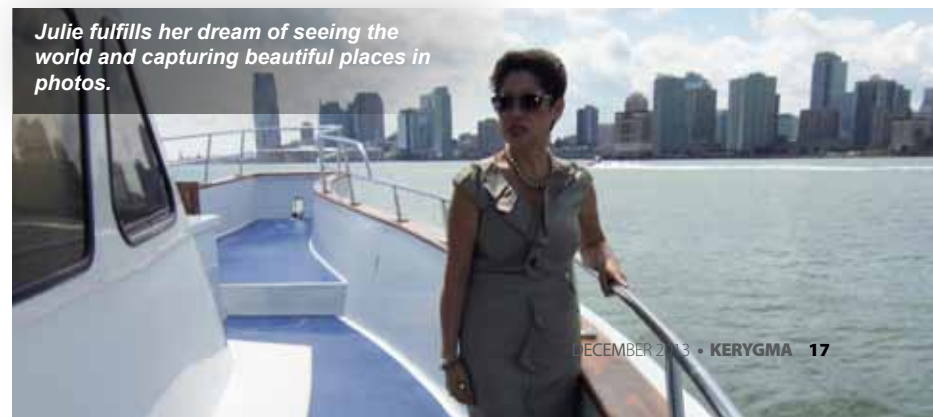
But I found what I was not looking for — the man who would change my perception of men — when I was looking for a sewing machine table in a huge store. A gentleman with grayish hair welcomed me. He was Lou, the store manager. I never had any idea that he would be my PGG (perfect gift from God). He showed me little acts of kindness.

As we became closer, I told Lou that if he would ever fall in love with me, he would have to marry my family — and there were so many of us, all poor and needy. I had so many financial responsibilities, sending my younger sister to college, and saving money to regain custody of my son. He assured me he'd be there for me and would help me find my son.

He hugged me and said, "Give me their address and I will talk to Carol!" I had never felt such compassion and so much caring from a man. He found Carol at her work and told her of his mission to help find a common ground for me to be able to visit my son regularly. Lou's visit disturbed Carol and her mother. They left the area without my knowledge. All I could do was hope and pray that someday I would see my son again. It was a prayer that would be answered 14 years later.

Mother and Child Reunion

Armand, as I named him, sent me a letter with his pictures. He was already 19 years old. He said he wanted to see me. It was a joyful and tearful event for me when I finally saw him in 1994.



Julie fulfills her dream of seeing the world and capturing beautiful places in photos.

It broke my heart when he said he could not call me Mom because he already had one. After spending a few days with him, I realized he had been spoiled by my friend. I made a painful decision to let him go again.

This time my decision was based on tough love. I told him that although I loved and cared for him so much, he had to go back to Carol because I could not tolerate irresponsibility and flagrant disobedience. But my home would always be open for him whenever he decided to change his ways.


Giving Back

My life is more peaceful now. I go back to the Philippines every now and then. Piece by piece, I bought the land for my resort in Quezon Province, especially the land my father had lost by gambling. There I found the passion of my heart. I gardened from the first burst of sunlight to dusk. I found my heaven on Earth — and my true self. I found my peace and inner strength again. I found the Light to follow. God wanted me to see my divine reason for existence.

I invite the homeless children of Manila to camp at my resort every year. I also hold medical missions and give school supplies to poor children. One time, the Youth for Christ held a camp at my resort to share the Gospel of the Lord.

God has pruned my life — all the pain and sufferings — and has removed the unwanted growth, my unforgiving heart and resentments.

Looking back, I realized that God does not intend to harm us. Our suffering can also be an opportunity for great joy. It's up to us to find solace and comfort knowing there is God and He is the Light at the end of our tunnel.

Thank God I was able to get out of poverty — through faith in Him, sheer hard work, and a firm resolve to make my dreams come true. 



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By Bo Sanchez

EMBRACE THE GRACE OF ADVENT

A

lot of people just wait.

When we're in school, we wait to get a job.

When we're single, we wait to get married.

When we have babies, we wait for them to grow up quick.

When we have teens, we wait for them to mature.

When we're working, we wait for our retirement.

But if you really live in your "now," you'll never wait again in your life. You'll enjoy where you are.

When someone is late and says to you, "So sorry to keep you waiting," you should say, "I wasn't waiting. I was enjoying life. I was breathing in God's love. I was living and happy and blessed."

Of course, if you say that, people would think you're cuckoo or had shabu for breakfast.

But that is essentially what living in your "now" is. You don't really wait. Because waiting means your attention is focused on your future.

Not you. Your attention is focused on your "now."

And you're grateful for that "now."

Example?

If you're single, don't "wait" for a husband. Enjoy your singleness now. Embrace your freedom. Breathe in the blessings of God. Embrace His peace. Love His presence.

If you're still childless, don't "wait" for a baby. Enjoy your marriage now. Embrace your life today. Be blissful where you are.

If you're still financially hard up, don't "wait" for prosperity. Be grateful for the prosperity you have now. And because gratitude attracts what you're grateful for, this will attract more prosperity.

I love it when the Bible says, "But Jesus would go away to lonely places where He prayed" (Luke 5:16).

I love it because if it's good for Jesus, it must be good for us, too. In fact, Jesus also invited His friends to do exactly the same thing. "There were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his disciples didn't even have time to eat. So He said to them, 'Let us go off by ourselves to some place where we will be alone and you can rest for a while'" (Mark 6:31).


That means He'll bring you there. He'll meet you there. He'll accompany you in your trials. He'll never let you go.

And that "alone" place doesn't have to be a geographical place. That "alone" place is actually within you.

In the middle of noisy traffic, you can go to your heart and encounter Him there.

This issue's teaching articles come from no less than our beloved Archbishop of Manila, Luis Antonio "Chito" Cardinal Tagle.

Learn from his powerful teaching articles about how you can make this Advent a more meaningful experience for you — and turn your Christmas into a grace-filled one!

Merry Christmas! 

Special Section



IS YOUR BUCKET EMPTY?

**Advent Draws You to Dip
from the Well of Jesus**

*By His Eminence Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle
Archbishop of Manila*



When a baby is born, you wait. What will happen to this child? When will this child start to walk? When will this child start to say his first word? You are looking forward to it. That's Advent.

And then the child goes to school. You wait for the first afternoon when he arrives home and listen to his story of what happened in school that day. That's Advent.

Then you wait till this child becomes a high school student. When he becomes an adolescent, your Advent question becomes muddled up. Who will his friends be? Will he get into trouble? Will he become a drug addict or grow up to be a responsible adult? That's Advent.

And then your child finishes college and starts looking for a job. For some, looking for the right job is an Advent season that takes a lifetime.

Then your child gets married and becomes a parent. You are now a grandparent. And your Advent season changes. You are worried not only about the generation directly after yours. You are now in a fuller Advent season. You are concerned about the next two generations. Your waiting never ends.

The season of Advent is so open-ended. You don't know what will happen. There is a lot of grace, but there is also a lot of risks involved.

Human existence is a perpetual Advent. You are always waiting for the coming of the Lord — as grace, as salvation. And the world changes very fast. At every moment of change, a new Advent comes to us.

Among our poor brothers and sisters, Advent has become a lifestyle. Every day, they hope that there will be bread on the table. Every day, they hope and pray that they will not be evicted from their homes. Every day, they pray that they will be spared from sickness, because when disease comes, they don't have money to go to the hospital or to buy medicines.

Whether you are rich, poor, young or not so young, Advent is the thread that ties humanity together.

We are all waiting for salvation.

We are all waiting for the person whom we call Jesus.

And because our need for God never ends, Advent never ends.

As Christians, it is important for us to focus on our spiritual preparation for the coming of the Lord. Very clearly, Advent is a liturgical season in the Church. As a liturgical season, Advent is rather short. After Advent, you have the Christmas season.

But human existence and Christian life are an unending Advent. There is no moment in life where we are not in Advent.

What Does It Mean to Wait and Welcome Jesus?

Our main point for reflection in this article is the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. This text was also used in the 2012 Synod of Bishops to discuss the New Evangelization to share the faith.

The world is changing dramatically. In many parts of the world, the changes have eclipsed the world of faith. There are some parts of the world where believing in God is already being dismissed as unnecessary.

At the Synod, one bishop shared that somebody approached him and said, "Your Excellency, I have achieved everything that I have dreamed of. My life is secure and the life of my children is secure. I don't think I need God anymore. My life is OK as it is. I don't think God is needed." I was saddened when I heard that story.

The new evangelization is a call for us to understand the world and how we can facilitate the encounter between Jesus and the people of our time, the way He did with the woman at the well of Sychar.

Let us now look closely at this text:

And He had to pass through Samaria. So He came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph, and Jacob's well was there. So Jesus, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?"

Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw." He said to her, "Go, call your husband and come

here." The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly." The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He." At this point His disciples came, and they were amazed that He had been speaking with a woman, yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why do You speak with her?" So the woman left her water pot, and went into the city and said to the men, "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?" They went out of the city, and were coming to Him. From that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all the things that I have done." So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. Many more believed because of His word; and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world."

— John 4:4-42

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

Notice it was Jesus who came to the well first. He was tired from the journey. Even the Son of Man gets weary and thirsty. If Jesus experienced tiredness, then there must be something holy in tiredness. The Son of God can convert this manifestation of weakness into something profound. The tiredness of Jesus became His Advent. It was though He was waiting for someone. The humanity of Christ knew what Advent meant. He was a person of waiting. He trusted in God to send someone because He had no bucket. Even when He was tired and thirsty, He could not draw water from the cistern, but He knew how to wait. He

knew what it means to wait for God's intervention. And God intervened through the Samaritan woman — which was a real surprise as we can see from the reaction of the Apostles to Jesus. It was the Advent gift of God to Him.

Jesus asked the woman for a drink. She could not believe that a Jew asked a Samaritan for a drink. In the first place, the conversation was abnormal. Jews and Samaritans were supposed to be enemies. There should be no communication between them. But Jesus started the conversation.

In our relationship with Jesus, it is actually He who starts the encounter with us. Many times, we think that we initiate talking to Him when we pray. But it's actually Jesus who waits for us, and when we draw near, He starts the conversation.

Look at how He began talking to the Samaritan woman. He expressed a need: "Give me a drink." He started in humility, not from a perspective of power and triumphalism.

We All Have Needs

Often, people come to me with their many needs.

"Bishop, I have a problem."

"Bishop, I don't have money to buy medicine for my sick baby. Can I ask for help?"

"Bishop, can you talk to my son? He's rebelling."

People are so used to approaching priests with their needs, and rightly so.

But what saddens me is when we express our own needs, the reaction we normally get is the reaction of the Samaritan woman. "You come to me to satisfy your need?"

Once, a woman came to me asking for some money for medicine. I told her, "Let's go to the parish office. I don't have money with me now."

She looked surprised and said, "You're a bishop and you don't have money?"

So I showed her my wallet. It had only P20 inside. She laughed.

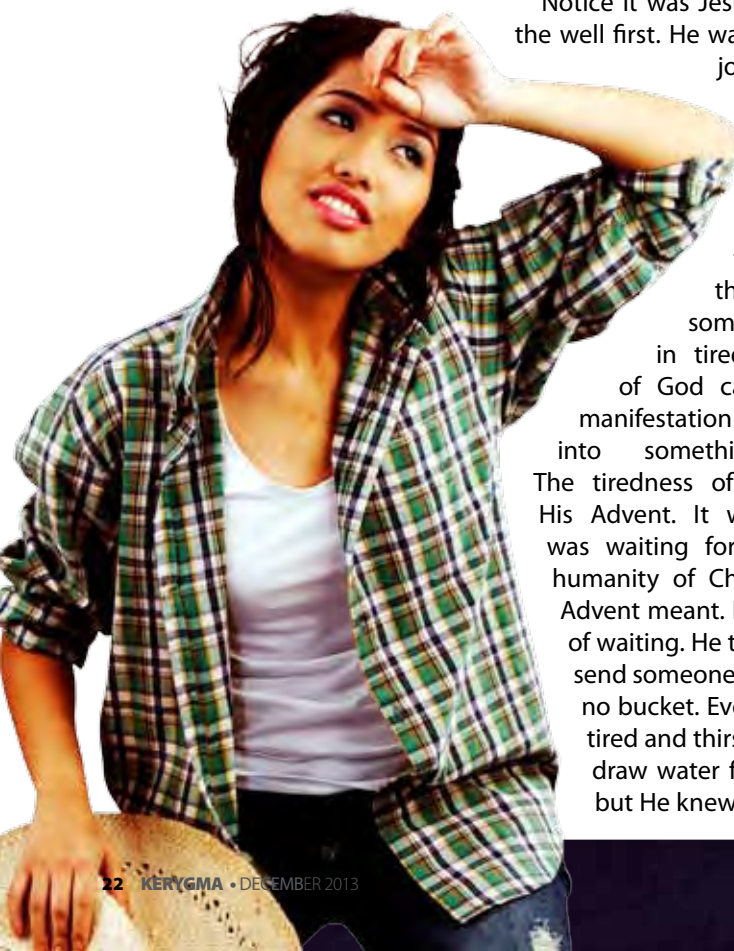
People think we have no needs and that we are self-sufficient. People think the Church has no needs.

Jesus Sees Our Empty Buckets

Let's go back to the Samaritan woman. When Jesus asked the woman to give Him a drink, it's as if He was saying, "You are the answer to My Advent, My waiting."

But the woman replied, "You are a Jew; I am a Samaritan. You should not talk to me. And if I give You a drink, my bucket or my pail would be touched by the lips of a Jew. You will become dirty. My bucket will become dirty. Besides, You are a man and I am a woman. There should be no interaction between us, especially in the expression of neediness."

Jesus made use of the situation and said, "If you only knew who is asking for water. If



you only knew that I could give you Living Water so that you will not thirst again, you will give me a drink.”

Now it is the woman’s turn to experience Advent. She comes with an empty pail to draw water and she encounters a mysterious Person promising her Living Water — the promise of eternal life.

How many of us don’t experience our pails getting empty? We all know what it’s like to have buckets without water.

Our intelligence can dry up. And there are some things that we cannot understand.

Husbands and wives sometimes reach the point of being unable to understand each other anymore — their pails have run dry.

Your bucket suddenly becomes empty, but you don’t want to expose your empty pail or bucket — your bucket of kindness, of patience, of understanding. But the deepest emptiness is when your bucket doesn’t have a meaning anymore. And you look for the deepest type of well where you can draw the freshest water, which is the meaning of life.

Where to Dip Your Buckets to Get Life-Giving Water

I am often invited to big, fabulous houses of the rich and famous — homes that are bigger than municipal or city halls. But the moment I enter such a house, I know if the bucket of the family living there is empty — empty of relationship, empty of meaningful conversations, empty of meaning.

The Samaritan woman is an image of all of us. We carry our buckets as we journey through life. Sometimes it is full, sometimes half-empty and sometimes empty. So we go around looking for wells.

The Synod of Bishops of 2012 said that the world offers many wells but we are advised to be very discerning — not to be too quick to satisfy our Advent desire or to cut short our waiting so that we dip our bucket right away at the first well that we see.

Many people want to cut short their Advent. They want it to be Christmas already. Beware, my friend, you might be dipping your buckets into polluted waters. And instead of satisfying your thirst, it will damage you and bring about more thirst.

The encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman tells us that wherever we may find ourselves — whether it is in Europe or Asia or America — people are looking for wells where they can get fresh water to satisfy their thirst.

And as Christians, we know that the clearest water comes from Jesus. He is the one who will give us life-giving water.

The Importance of an Encounter

Our Gospel story started with the woman’s encounter that

shook her life like an earthquake. Who is this Jew? Why is He talking to me? Why does He ask for water from me?

But that was just the beginning. What started as some sort of a disturbance became an opening.

After an earthquake, one of the things we do is check for cracks on our walls, on our floors, or even on the street. When we find one, we anticipate something to cave in.

But the opening can also be something positive. Because when something is open, then something else can now enter. That’s what happened to the Samaritan woman. Jesus said, “Bring your husband here.”


She replied, “I have no husband.”

Jesus used this opportunity to prepare her for faith: “You have correctly said, ‘I have no husband,’ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband.”

This opened her eyes to see Jesus in another way: “Are you a prophet? Because I know the Jews are waiting for a prophet who will tell us about everything, who will tell us the truth.”

The Advent of Jesus to the Samaritan woman caused her a lot of disturbance, but it was the liberating kind. It was a journey into her own self, setting her free from the social and cultural barriers that separated Jews from Samaritans, men from women, lies from the truth.

Advent is the coming of Someone who will shed all our masks, who will lead us gently but firmly into the truth about ourselves. It can be painful, but in the end, it liberates us and leads us to faith.

My dear friends, may you have a meaningful encounter with Jesus this Advent. 

(This article is based on Cardinal Tagle’s Advent Recollection talk at the Ateneo de Manila University in December 2012.)

Bo’s Action Steps:

1. What are you thirsty for?
2. What healthy and non-addictive ways can help quench your thirst and satisfy your needs?





I Didn't Know I Was a *Baptized Catholic* — Until I Entered the Convent

By Sr. Ma. Elizabeth Butay, MCST
As told to Dina Marie F. Pecaña
Written by Tess V. Atienza

Itold the driver, "Please drop me off at a convent, wherever that is."

The jeepney had traveled quite a distance but no convent was in sight. So I got off and was about to take another jeepney to go back to where I came from, when I asked a bystander, "Is there a convent somewhere near?" To my surprise, he pointed to a sign down the street which said, "MCST (Missionary Catechists of St. Therese of the Child Jesus) Convent."

I walked to the convent, rang the bell, and a sister promptly opened the gate. "What can I do for you?" she asked.

"I'm interested to become a nun, sister," I replied.

"Oh, you came just in time! See that bus with many young ladies on board? You can join them in going to Tayabas, Quezon. Do you have some clothes with you?" she asked as she looked at my bag.

"Yes, sister," and I hopped on the bus. And that was how my journey to the religious life began.

Strange Pulls

My Theology professor at Adamson University, where I took up Chemical Engineering, often asked me to help him organize Masses in the campus. One Ash Wednesday, he even requested me to assist him in administering ashes. What he didn't know was that I wasn't a Catholic. I belonged to the Iglesia ni Cristo.

I almost failed in the preliminary exam of one of my subjects and ran the risk of losing my scholarship. For the first time in my life, I went to the St. Theresa's Chapel inside the campus to pray. When I saw the cross hanging at the altar, I felt something strange envelop my being. Then I talked to God and challenged Him: "You are my only hope. Prove to me that You are God. I want to get a score of at least 95!" I was already crying in desperation.

When I went to my classroom to take the exam, I made the sign

of the cross. And when I began answering the test questions, I could not control my hand from writing. The result? I got a score of 98 and, thus, was able to maintain my scholarship.

Drawing Closer to the Sacraments

Though I felt certain pulls to the Catholic Church, I did not yet formally convert. But God was certainly creative in drawing me to the Catholic faith.

One time, my brother, Efren, got sick and had to be hospitalized. It happened when there was heavy flooding in Ilocos, our province. We needed P10,000 for the hospital deposit and I had only half the amount. Our parents could not send money because all means of communication were cut.

I didn't know what to do. I was walking aimlessly along Taft Avenue when I felt drawn to enter the chapel of St. Vincent de Paul Parish near Adamson University. I heard the people singing, "For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours..."

Again, I didn't know what enveloped me the moment I stepped inside the chapel. I just followed what the people were doing. When it was communion time, I fell in line and had my "first" communion. Then I returned to the back of the chapel and knelt down. I was crying profusely. I looked at the statue of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal and talked to her, "What will happen to my brother?" And then I made a promise that if my brother gets well, I will give my whole life to God.

A little boy suddenly approached me and begged for money. I gave my wallet to the boy and was left with nothing in my hands. In hindsight, I felt numbed or was probably out of my mind when I gave away my wallet.

Next, a stranger came up to me and said, "Be strong,

my child." At that point, I knew in my heart that something different was happening to me. Then another queue caught my attention. Again, I fell in line on what was to become my "first" confession. I asked the priest, "What is confession?"

The priest explained everything to me, "You just tell me your sins." I challenged him, "Why would I tell you my sins?"

He explained to me the sacrament. Then I shared with him what happened to my brother. He offered me some words of consolation and so I went home hopeful. To my surprise, a friend of my mother helped us pay the bills until Efren got well.

But the priest's words remained in my heart: "Jesus loves you. Your brothers love you very much. Why not think of Jesus as your Brother, too?"

Since then, I kept going back to that church. When Efren saw me there one day, he said, "Ate, you'll go to hell because of what you're doing!" But I told him, "Just try it, too. We won't lose anything. Let's just sit at the back." So Efren and I visited the church every time we went to the nearby supermarket. We enjoyed listening to the homilies and the Mass readings.

Eventually, our mother discovered our escapade. I half-expected that she would reprimand us. Instead, our mother revealed that she, too, was secretly going to Mass in a Catholic church in another town so that our father would not know. Only then did she reveal to us that she grew up in a Catholic environment because she was an orphan (her mother died when she was three) and her father, from time to time, left for work, leaving her in the care of nuns.

The Beginning of My Call to the Religious Life

Since then, whenever my mother and I would go out and see a nun, I would try to engage her in a conversation. Unfortunately, no one invited me to try their congregation.

While attending Mass one day, a nun served as lector. I approached the sister after the Mass and asked if she also took the seminar for would-be lectors/commentators. The nun said, "Not anymore because I'm a nun."

Aha! I thought to myself, "So that's it! I want to be a nun so I could read at Mass." That, I think, was the beginning of my call to the religious life — an innocent desire which God used to draw me to be His bride.

To Know and Love Jesus More

Over time, I began seeing transformations in myself. For example, I'd gather the coins that my classmates and boardmates left lying around, put them in a piggy bank, and buy food for the streetchildren in the Chinese and Japanese Gardens in Luneta. I had a best friend then — a Muslim — and together we would teach the children, give them old clothes, and just befriend them.

As I grew in loving others in small ways, I discovered the real desire of my heart: to know and love Jesus more. And so I went in search of a convent one morning and found myself boarding a bus with other young ladies to the MCST convent in Quezon.

After the search-in, I went on with my work as college instructor in the Technological University of the Philippines and quality control analyst of Asia Capsule, Inc. But with the passage of time, I could no longer ignore my calling, which was getting stronger.

In the summer of 1990, I went home to Ilocos to tell my parents about my desire to enter the religious life. My father strongly objected and even threatened to kill me than allow me to become a nun. With a bolo in one hand, he guarded our gate. But I knew deep within that he would not harm me — that's how confident I was of his love for me.

I left our house and passed him by at the gate. He didn't do anything. A tricycle was waiting for me two blocks away. I learned later that he instructed my mother to bring me to the convent.

Initially, the sisters were happy to accept me. But when my mother talked to them, they sang a different tune: "Don't you think you're too young? It might not yet be time for you to enter." I was already 24 years old.

My mother also talked to their superior general to disallow me to enter, but the latter had the charisma that you can't say no to her. She simply told my mother, "Why don't you just let her try?"

At that point, caught by God's embrace, I had grown to love Jesus so much that their discouragement could not make me change my decision to enter the religious life.

And then the biggest surprise of my life came. While preparing my entry papers, I stumbled upon the truth that I was, in fact, a baptized Catholic!

Becoming God's Faithful Daughter — and Bride


Well, true to what the sisters said, life in the convent was not easy. When I opened myself to God, the more I felt my nothingness. At times I felt helpless — and even hopeless — in pursuing my calling, but something would always make me want to hold on. I'd always tell Jesus, "Hold me, Lord, that I may not lose grip of Your hands because I am too weak to hold on to You."

While I had my low moments, I got my consolations from the Lord, too. I simply look for the face of Jesus in whatever happens to me. St. Therese of the Child Jesus became my friend and model to do ordinary things extraordinarily well with love and sacrifice.

I just think of the love of God, trusting that He will give me everything I need if I just continue to be His faithful daughter. Nothing — no material things — can surpass the love that I have experienced and still continuously experience in the vocation I have chosen.

And so, on June 4, 2000, on the Great Jubilee Year, I vowed to follow Jesus and love Him above all else for the rest of my life, abiding by the example of St. Therese of the Child Jesus and our founder, Servant of God, Alfredo Ma. Obviar.

By the grace of God, everyone in my family, including my father, embraced not only my calling but also the Catholic faith.

Truly, God works in mysterious ways — more than we can ever imagine! 



ADVENT
LEADS
US TO
THE
TRUTH



**But What Do You Need to
Leave Behind?**

**By His Eminence, Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle
Archbishop of Manila**

Take a look at our Advent and Christmas images in the Philippines and you'll notice that they're all delusionary. Reindeer. Santa Claus. Snow. We don't have any of them here!

Advent leads us to the truth — or what we might call the inconvenient truth. Because the One coming to us is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He gives us the true water, not the polluted waters of lies and illusions.

True Advent spirit is the encounter that produces a new person — a person that knows one's self a little better — because Jesus the Truth brought him to the truth about who he is. Because Jesus, who gives the Living Water, makes him aware of what his real thirsts are. Our deepest thirst is for God.

Look at what happened to the Samaritan woman. When she somehow got fascinated with Jesus, she went home and forgot her bucket. She left her water jar and went out proclaiming, "I have met this special person who told me everything that I have done."

Her real thirst had been quenched. She no longer needed her empty jar because the jar of her heart was now filled. It was filled with truth and the joy that comes from an encounter with a Person who is Truth.

This turns her into a missionary, telling people about Jesus, sharing with them her encounter, her conversation, and her liberation.

Friend, what are the jars that you should leave behind?

Is it your cell phone? Your lipstick, your makeup kit, your hairbrush?

The real advent is this: When I have already encountered truth in person, all the other truths don't matter anymore. Because your real bucket, your real jar — the jar of your person — is now filled with Jesus.

In these changing times, we need more of the Samaritan woman who becomes an evangelizer, the bringer of the Good News to other people. According to this Bible story, the people first started to believe in Jesus because of the testimony of the Samaritan woman.

But later on, the people begged Jesus to stay and they themselves had an experience with Jesus. They became believers and they told the woman, "At first we believed in Jesus because of your word; now we believe in Him because we have seen for ourselves." I'm sure those people will go to others, and more and more will encounter Jesus.

How Does One Become a Missionary?

"If I had not experienced Jesus," according to St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:1, "If I do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal."

So to prepare ourselves for Christmas, Advent is the season to sit at the many wells of humanity.

Let us encounter people whose buckets are empty. We who have seen Jesus should tell them the Good News that their waiting is not in vain. For there is Someone who will come — Someone who knows our thirsts, Someone who suffers with us, Someone who knows what it means to beg for water. And because He understands our situation, He will give us what we need: life-giving water.

But first we need to encounter Jesus. Without that experience of Jesus, how can we tell people about Him?

From the first letter of St. John, we read: "What we have heard with our ears, what we have touched with our hands, we in turn pass on to you" (1 John 1:1).

Have we seen Jesus? Have we heard Him? Have we touched Him? Only with that living encounter can we be Advent people — going to others who are waiting for life, waiting for the truth, waiting for the right way.

We encounter Jesus if we are attentive just like the Samaritan woman — attentive as to who is conversing with us.



Is Jesus talking to me now?
Is Jesus inviting me to do something?
Is Jesus liberating me?
Is Jesus leading me to the truth?

Is Jesus telling me to leave behind some of my jars so that I can freely run to other people and share with them the Good News?

The Samaritan woman could run because she left behind all her jars.

So I ask you, are your bags heavy?

Advent Is Not Just a Liturgical Season

Even when Christmas is over and we are already in the Lenten Season or Easter or Ordinary Time, it's still Advent.

Yes, Advent is not just a liturgical season but a component of our lives. It's a component of people who believe that Jesus is alive, and they patiently wait for His time and His action. But we are vigilant — we are there, we want to catch the moment — so that we can respond to Jesus, so that we can be missionaries, people who would proclaim to the ends of the earth that we have encountered the One who knows us and, in spite of knowing our weaknesses and our lies, loves us.

As a final point, Jesus, whom we are waiting for, comes as a human being. He is incarnate of the Blessed Virgin. The Word

became flesh, became human, and so human that He knew how to suffer, He knew how to become thirsty, He knew how to beg: "Give me a drink."

We wait for Jesus who will reveal to us the face of God, but who will also reveal to us how to be human. Jesus did not only make known to us the face of God, He is the image of the invisible God.

Through Jesus, we see the mercy of God. We see the compassion of God as Jesus ate with Zacchaeus, Matthew and the tax collectors. We see how God in Jesus embraced public sinners, or allowed the woman of ill repute to wash His feet. We see that, in Jesus, God has a place for those who are shunned by society. Jesus, who called simple fishermen to be His disciples, showed us the face of God who has a predilection for the lowly and the simple. So we see the heart of God in Jesus.

This is part of an Advent. We long to see more and more of who God is in Jesus. But at the same time, in Jesus, who became human, we learn how it is to be human.

So Advent is not just waiting for the revelation of God but also for the revelation of humanity.

What does it mean to be fully human?

Do you examine your life before going to bed? Before going to bed, it would do you good to review your day. I'm sure you will discover many things that happened during your day, especially things that happened in your minds and in your hearts. At the end of the day, there are many things to thank God for. There are also many things that you regret. You wished you had been more patient, more loving, more humble. In a nutshell, at the end of the day, we say, "I wish I had been a better person." And since every day is an Advent, we pray that we will become better persons tomorrow.

Every day is an Advent season. We wait to become a better person, to be more Christ-like, to be more conformed to the image of Christ.

Being Fully a Child and Fully Human

When Jesus became human in the womb of the Virgin Mary, He became a child.

Children are characterized by dependence on others. A child depends on a father and a mother for the beginning of his or her life. Of course, that life is a gift of God but on the human level, the child cannot produce himself. So, from the very beginning of our human life, which is a gift of God, we depended on a man whom we call our father and a woman whom we call our mother.

And that is just the beginning. Even if you are already a college student, you are still a child — you depend on your parents for allowance and you depend on your teachers for guidance. Even when you're already a priest, a bishop, or a cardinal like me, you have to depend on the Word of God. I have to depend on so many people — on writers, consultants, and men and women of goodwill. And in many aspects of life, I still have to depend on my parents. Fortunately, they are still around.

So you really never graduate from being a child. This is the face of being human that Jesus assumed. He became

a child. From His conception in the womb of Mary until His death, He was a child. He never said He did not need God. He never said He didn't need other people. He always needed God.

In our contemporary age, we appreciate autonomy and self-sufficiency. We don't want to depend on other people or on God. But when we do that, something happens that we are not even aware of. We lose our humanity. A person who does not need anyone, who is self-contained and self-sufficient, loses heart. He becomes a robot, not a human.

This is what we are waiting for — a return to the human face that Jesus assumed, and not to be ashamed to be human, declaring to the world that we need God. We need one another.

If you shun dependence on God and other people, then you are back to the temptation in the Garden of Eden, where you will be like gods. You will not need God anymore. When Adam and Even pretended to be God, they did not need each other anymore. The moment our dependence on God is gone, we will destroy each other and we will destroy our humanity.

Thus, we wait for the manifestation of the God who became human to save us. He will save our humanity from false images and philosophies spreading around, pretending they are giving us the solution to our human problems, when in fact they are cutting our ties with God and with one another. In the end, we lose our humanity.

So I hope that after Advent, when Christmas comes and even after Christmas, we will all become more human. And during the veneration of the Child Jesus after the Christmas Mass, I hope you don't stop at kissing or touching the statue. Make a promise to Him: "I will imitate Your humanity. You came to be human; teach me how to be human."

In Jesus, to be human is to be like a child — always open to the Father, to humanity, to Joseph, to Mary; always open to the many Samaritan women begging them, "Give Me a drink." It does not diminish His divine Sonship. It does not diminish His being fully human. In fact, because of His total dependence on God, He became, according to the letter to the Hebrews, a compassionate Brother to all of us. He understands the thirst, the hunger and the poverty of other people because He remained a child.

People who do not depend on God or on others do not understand the needs of other people. They become distant. The needs of others become alien to them. They lose their humanity.

Jesus became a compassionate Brother rather than a harsh judge to save us because He became dependent — fully a child and fully human.

Let's follow His example. 

(This article is based on Cardinal Tagle's Advent Recollection talk at the Ateneo de Manila University in December 2012.)



Bo's Action Steps:

1. Recall your Jesus encounters.
2. What happened after those encounters?
3. How did you share the joy of your encounters?
4. What can you do now to share Jesus to others?



P

ople tell me they want my job. I get paid to travel and eat. I host a weekly travel show, *I Love Pinas*¹, and my experiences in this show, as well as personal trips with friends and family, are documented in my website, www.crispypataatkarekare.com.

At the same time, I serve at the Light of Jesus Family in different capacities — as worship leader, as writer for *Didache* and *Gabay*, as preacher in Bo Sanchez’s online show, www.preacherinbluejeans.com, and as campus minister.²

But if God so wills it, I’m ready to give it all up. I’ve done it before and I can do it again because God is now my Boss.

A Very Promising Career

I started my TV career when I was in high school as a member of the Ateneo High School Glee Club. Then later, together with Age of Wonder and Gino Padilla, I recorded four songs in CD and cassette for Ivory Records that were released in Asia based on the Japanese soundtrack of *DragonBall* and *DragonBall Z*.

I took up Broadcast Communication at the University of the Philippines in Diliman. But even while in college, projects came my way. I had TV guestings, voice talent projects, and a show on Channel 5 (now TV5) entitled *The Net Generation* with Niña Corpuz and her sister, Bads.

After my graduation in 1999, I worked full-time for GMA 7 as segment host and segment producer of its morning show, *Mornings@GMA*, which later became *Unang Hirit*. Since I had a non-exclusive contract that time, I had shows and TV guestings in other networks.

My career was definitely rosy.

Kidnapped and Ready to Die!

After a few years, I moved on to become a reporter and part-time news anchor, exclusive for GMA network. This work included coverages all over the country and abroad.

In 2002, network reporters were assigned to take turns in covering a dangerous area in Southern Philippines. We were following a lead on the whereabouts of missing foreign fishermen. When I arrived there during my turn, we learned that the information we received was a hoax. Instead of being led to the alleged location of the missing foreigners, we were brought to an armed family in the hinterlands. We were divested of everything we had — phones, cameras, wallets — and were threatened to be killed if we tried to escape. But we could not think of doing so because we didn’t know the terrain. Either we would get lost or be captured by another bandit group.

My faith helped me during that ordeal. I recalled

Happy and Free

— as a Missionary!



Serving God through The Feast is one of the many joys that fill Carlo’s life.

**By Carlo Lorenzo
as told to Bella Estrella**

stories about Christians being beheaded and saints who suffered terrible deaths. Who was I compared to them?

I kept praying. I already imagined myself in heaven being embraced by God as He said, "Carlo, you're finally home. You will never be hurt again." That thought gave me peace.

But it was not yet our time. Our driver, who was left behind in our vehicle, sensed that something was wrong. When we didn't return, he reported it to the police. After six days, we were rescued.

I couldn't stand the sight of firearms after that experience. For two weeks, I was jumpy and easily frightened. I couldn't travel alone. Little by little, however, I was able to overcome my fears, and I developed a deeper appreciation for life.

It was during my captivity when I experienced a different kind of freedom — freedom from expectations, freedom from materialism, and freedom from my ambitions. That experience liberated me from my own prisons. It dawned on me that everything that I had — my career, my life, and my future — could all vanish in the blink of an eye.

God Asked Me to Resign

In 2007, I began experiencing spiritual dryness. I found the Catholic Mass boring. I enjoyed Born Again gatherings more. I believe that it is not religion that saves, but a personal relationship with Jesus. I was about to leave the Catholic Church, but it was my job that I gave up instead.

I prayed, "God, You lead and I will follow. If I can't find joy in my Catholic faith, I will join the Born Again movement."

And God's answer came quickly. The following day, a friend invited me to The Feast, the weekly prayer gathering of the Light of Jesus (LOJ) Family. I was amazed. The celebration

of the Mass was lively. There was great worship. The talk was powerful and relevant to everyday life. The things I loved in Born Again gatherings were all there at The Feast! And it's Catholic! I didn't have to leave my Church, after all.

I desired to serve God through The Feast, but my work schedule got in the way. Through the talks, I felt God telling me, "Carlo, resign." The verse from Matthew 6:33 kept reverberating in my mind, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

The thought of resigning gave me inner peace, but I was not ready for it. I received regular salary increases. I had good exposure. I became a news contributor for the CNN World Report. I was helping viewers witness history unfold. Why would I resign and give up my dream of having my own show? Besides, I was still paying a loan.

Two years passed. I hadn't finished paying my loan. And I still didn't have my own show.

But in 2009, I finally plunged and followed the voice of God. I said, "Lord, even if I haven't fully paid my loan, I will still survive. Even if I don't have my own show, I'll still be OK. I can give up everything now. I want to follow You."

My family, friends, colleagues and bosses found my decision illogical. Many were disappointed. My superiors, however, still gave me the assurance that I could return anytime I wanted.

The first three months after I resigned were painful. I groped for my real identity. "Now that I'm no longer a newscaster, who am I?" was a question that pierced my mind.

God spoke to my heart, "More than being a newscaster, you are My child. Your identity as a Christian should outweigh everything else that defines who you are." Finally, I perfectly understood why He wanted me to give up my job.

Reorganizing My Life


My priorities changed since then. God has become more important than my dreams. I depended on Him for everything, and He faithfully provided for all my needs.

My finances dwindled. I was nearly broke in 2010 when I received a call to temporarily host the program *Diyos at Bayan*, which aired on GMA 7 and Light TV 33. The program hosts were running for public office and they went on leave during the campaign period until the elections.

After the elections, my hosting stint got extended to seven more months, enough time for me to completely pay off my loan. When I was already debt-free, the original hosts returned to the show in December 2010. I believe it was God who orchestrated everything. I was happy and content.

But God wasn't finished. In 2011, I was offered to host solo my very own show, *I Love Pinas*, which I still do until today. He fulfilled my dream!

God asked me to resign from my previous job so that I could empty my hands of what I was holding on to, and He gave me something better — a job that I really enjoy doing while I also serve Him and evangelize many.

The things in life that I enjoy now are temporary. God may take them away. But what matters most to me now is that I am holding on to the only One that is permanent — God. 



Carlo has an enviable job as host of *I Love Pinas*.



Carlo and the UPCF volunteers in an outreach activity.

¹ *I Love Pinas* is a 30-minute travel show that entertains and informs viewers about the different wonders in the Philippines. It airs on Thursdays, 11:59 p.m. on GMA News TV (QTV), and on Saturdays, 5:30 p.m. and Wednesdays, 6 p.m. at Light TV 33.

² Carlo serves at the different Feasts (the weekly prayer gatherings of LOJ) and the Kerygma Conference (the biggest yearly Catholic event in the Philippines organized by LOJ). He ministers to students via the UP Campus Feast every Tuesday from 6 to 8 p.m. at Balay Kalinaw in UP Diliman.

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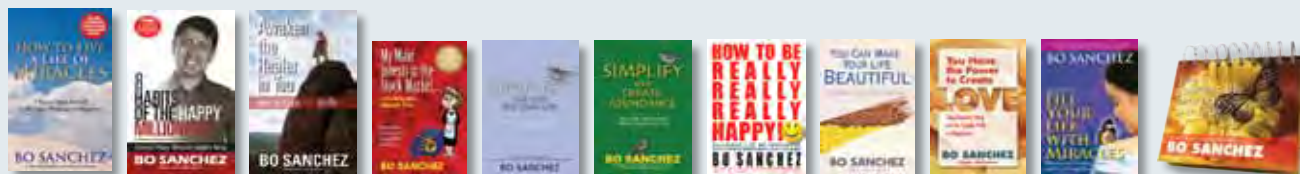
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13. Per DTI-NCR Permit No. 1459 Series of 2013.



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Embracing the *Present*

By Beth Melchor

O

ne time, a widow in our community turned to the five single women in our community as she celebrated her 80th birthday and said, “Don’t lose hope, you can still get married.”

When I told her that I had already made a life-long commitment to live as a consecrated woman and have been happily living this vocation for the past 20 years, she replied, “Never say never. You can

still get married.”

I know she was trying to be helpful, but her response highlights how singles often find themselves on the defensive in today’s couple’s world.

In a society where marriage is highly prized, not being married is often looked upon as an undesirable state of life that should be disdained and thrown off as quickly as possible. Even singles who are happy with their state of life are likely to hear comments like, “What a waste!” or “Don’t worry, it’s never too late, the right man is out there.”

This attitude has made life difficult for women who are still single in their mid- to late 30s. Many of them would prefer to be married but find themselves still single, often through no fault of their own. Some have grown bitter about their lot in life and are tempted to blame God for denying them their heart’s desire.


Herein lies a difficulty when we see marriage as a desired end in itself and close ourselves to the possibility of any happiness or fulfillment apart from the married life. Marriage indeed is a gift that we receive from the hands of the Lord — just like any other gift. But at times, we place more value on the gift rather than the Giver.

Marriage should not be seen as an end in itself. As with all vocations, it is a path to holiness where one is called to live out the fundamental call to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. St. Ignatius of Loyola teaches us that man is created to praise, reverence and serve God, and all other things on the face of the earth are created for man to help him fulfill the end for which he is created. Marriage should lead us to love God and should not be desired more than, much less apart from, God.

For those who find themselves single by default, it may be difficult, if not impossible, to

make sense of their situation unless they are willing to see their lives from a faith perspective. Rather than distance ourselves from God and withdraw our trust in Him, it would be better to open our heart to God and seek to understand our lives through reflection and prayer.

When we put a misplaced premium on marriage, we unknowingly place our lives on hold when we find ourselves unmarried because of circumstances beyond our control. I have met many single women in their late 30s who are *not living* their lives, but instead are *waiting* — waiting for the right man to come along to save them from falling into the pit of a life deprived of wedded bliss. It is wrong to put our lives on hold because our lives are not meant to be centered on marriage but on God. The lives of numerous saints and ordinary Christians who have lived their single life in a joyful and fulfilled manner prove that this is true.

Life is a matter of choice. We can choose to live the present moment to the full or we can choose to fail to recognize the giftedness of the present moment because the grass seems to be greener on the other side of the fence. Let us embrace the present moment and trust the perfect plan God has for our lives. 

Email me at bethmelchor.seasons@gmail.com.

Beth is a woman leader of Ang Ligaya ng Panginoon Community who serves in the youth ministry, pastoral care for women, mission work in Asia, and international leadership training. Beth is an educator and leads Jerusalem House, a mission household of single women.





Anno Domini

By Edgardo C. de Vera

Filipino tourists standing before the statue of Pope Gregory XIII at St. Peter's Basilica were asked by their witty tour guide, "What happened in the Philippines on October 6, 1582?"

A lull, then uncertain answers: "Blood compact between Legazpi and Sikatuna?"

"Founding of Manila?"

"Start of the galleon trade?"

"Nothing," corrected the guide, "because that date did not exist."

On October 5, 1582, Pope Gregory XIII promulgated the adoption of a revised calendar to replace the Julian calendar. The date was advanced by 10 days in its implementation to October 15. Liturgical year, conformed to Jewish lunar calendar, was at that time running late; Easter had drifted two weeks from Passover. Pope Gregory consulted Italian astronomer Aloysius Lilius and German Jesuit mathematician Christopher Clavius, both of whom proposed date readjustments and revision of the leap-year system for a more precise synch with the seasons. January replaced March as first month.

The Gregorian calendar met with little acclaim in Protestant regions. Having just gone through the Reformation, Protestants nixed the new system and adhered to the Julian calendar despite its imperfections. Dual calendars were used in Protestant countries: Old Style for domestic use, New Style for trade and diplomatic relations with Catholics.


Gradually the new calendar gained acceptance because of its accuracy (error margin of just a day in 20,000 years) and to prevent confusion arising from dual calendars. England stubbornly held out until 1752 when the English were 11 days behind all of Europe.

Now some scholars say that *Anno Domini* is off by a couple of years. Jesus was born earlier, circa 6 BC since Herod, who butchered the Holy

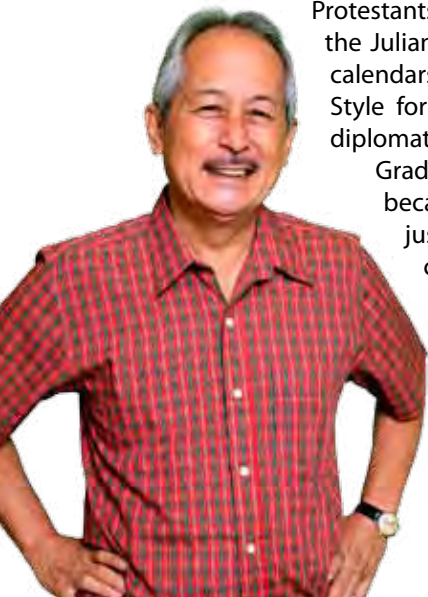
Innocents, would already have been dead. Other exegetes however claim Luke's Gospel as a more accurate basis for determining the birth year of Jesus. Matthew's Gospel, being thematic of the Messianic reign, principally addressed Jews. Herod's inclusion illustrates the worldly powers' opposition personified by Herod to the Messiah. The Magi personified the Gentiles' acceptance of Jesus as Messiah and had embarked on an early search.

Herod was an Idumite, a foreigner. A fake king of Judah propped up by Romans who legitimized his reign with marriage to Miriam, sister of Aristobolus III, Jewish high priest descended from the non-Davidic Hasmonean Dynasty. Jealously protective of his illegitimate rule, he murdered three sons, his brother-in-law, Aristobolus, several relatives, five of 10 wives (kicking Miriam to death), and was known to systematically eliminate contenders to the throne — infants included even before Jesus was born.

Luke addressed a wider audience in the Gentile world, laying an orderly historical account attested in his prologue "...those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word... that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed..." His Infancy Narrative is set in accord with Gentile reckoning and chronology: the census (Luke 2:1), John the Baptist baptising in the 15th year of Tiberius' reign (Luke 3:1), and age of Jesus at the time (Luke 3:23). The established historical facts are Augustus Caesar's edict on the 27th year of his 42-year reign, and Tiberius' succession as emperor in 15 AD and 30-year rule.

When Gregory reformed the calendar, 1582 AD was never in question. Scholars can argue all they want, but who is correct doesn't matter. Christ is Lord of time and history. All the years are *Anno Domini*. 

Email me at catholicsoul@gmail.com.





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No Asthma Attack

By Arun Gogna

When I was in high school, I belonged to our parish choir. We were a group of young men and women who found time to serve the church by singing in the Sunday Masses. For a (handsome) teenager like me, it was also a perfect opportunity to get to meet and befriend girls.

In one occasion, the leaders of the choir organized an acquaintance party. We were required to bring a partner or a date. Now despite my charm (I'm brainwashing you!), I did not have an

idea who to invite as my date. I had no girlfriend and not many girl friends. I revealed my problem to one of the boys in our group.

"No problem, Arun! I will arrange a date for you!"

"Really?" I asked with much suspicion.

You see, this friend of mine was known for making pranks and playing games. I did not want to give him the chance. But he insisted.

"Don't worry about it. I will take care of it. There's this girl I know. She's so beautiful. You will like her. I will be the one to invite her for you."

"Are you sure? You might just be kidding." I still couldn't believe him.

"No, bro. OK, here's what we will do. Just go and pick her up. And when you see her and you don't like her, just cough and cough. Tell her, 'I'm sorry, I'm having an asthma attack.'"

I agreed to his seemingly flawless plan.

I mean, he presented a way out, right? How bad could it get?

The night of the party came. I chose a nice light-colored shirt and sprayed good perfume on myself. I looked at the piece of paper with the address of my mystery date. I then walked down the street to pick her up.

I sorted out the instructions in my head and then tapped on their gate. Someone came out, I introduced myself. I was told to wait.

When the next person appeared at the door,

I was dumbfounded. She was absolutely beautiful. She was fair-skinned, had a spectacular smile, and was neatly dressed. She walked towards me and I felt my pulse rate quicken. Her eyes were almond shaped and, through her gaze, I could tell it was going to be a glorious evening.

My dreaminess was interrupted when she started coughing as she neared.

"Hi," I said, "I'm Arun. How are you?"

She spoke in between bouts of heavy coughing. "Oh, hi. Sorry, sorry." She said with much difficulty. "I think I'm having an asthma attack."

That was how my glorious evening came to a crashing end.


My dear friend, let me say this: *God will never have an asthma attack on you.* He simply likes you *too much* to leave you at the gate. He's head over heels over you. He doesn't only love you, *He likes you.*

This time of the year, we celebrate the greatest season of love. This season, we look at a baby in a manger, meek and gentle as can be.

Every year, every Christmas, we are reminded of this kind of love that God has for man — a love that will never fail, that will never give up, that will go far beyond any boundary just to make itself known.

No one can love us like this.

I invite you this Christmas to relish this love. As you spend time with family. As you give and receive gifts. As you attend every celebration. As you go to every novena Mass. As you partake of the Eucharist.

Bless your soul with the love of Emmanuel, *the God who likes you.* 

Email Arun at kpreacherarun@gmail.com.

Arun Gogna is the senior Feast builder of *The Feast Alabang*. He has written four books, the latest of which is *Lasting Gifts*. All available at www.shepherdsvoice.com.ph.



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Clarisa's experience taught her that nothing is impossible with God — if we only ask.



One Last Story



Ask and You Shall Receive

By Clarisa Alcontin as told to Judith Concepcion

husband put in extra hours in driving his tricycle to earn more. Through God's grace, my husband was able to earn enough to provide for my day-to-day expenses related to my pregnancy. It helped a lot that we lived with my parents who didn't oblige us to share in the household expenses like food and utilities.


On December 29, 2012, three weeks before my due date, I gave birth to a baby boy via Caesarian section. Before I was sedated, I saw that my baby's umbilical cord coiled around his neck, which was the reason for his very rapid movement inside my womb and his stronger-than-usual kicks. He probably wanted to come out already. Thank God I delivered him just in time. I also had bleeding, which according to the doctor, could endanger my life. Thank God my bleeding stopped after five hours.

After our four-day stay in the hospital, our bill soared to P90,000. My husband and I didn't have Social Security, Philhealth or any health card. The only thing we had was the green card (a privilege card issued by the mayor of Las Piñas), which would entitle us to a P25,000-deduction from our hospital bill. But God didn't abandon us. He provided for the balance through the generosity of friends and family.

No More Worries

This experience taught me that there's nothing impossible with God. If only we are faithful and true to Him in asking for His help, He would not fail us in our need. I also learned how to trust in Him and to wait on Him for His perfect timing in answering my prayers. I've been attending The Feast and it has helped me a lot in renewing my hope and strengthening my faith in God.

I now have a small business to help augment my husband's income, which enables us to give our share in the household expenses. My baby is in good health.

If God blesses us later with another child, I will no longer be afraid and worried. I believe that we'll be able to pull it through because God is with us. If He saw us through before, He will surely do it again. All we need to do is ask. 

I had another miscarriage — my second in a span of six months. It was only after consulting another specialist and testing positive in the APAS panel laboratory exam that I learned why my babies died in my womb. I was diagnosed to have APAS (Antiphospholipid Antibody Syndrome), an autoimmune disorder where my antibodies attack and damage the growing fetus inside me. The blood becomes sticky resulting to blood clots. In my case, blood clots formed in my placenta. Thus, the blood, which provides the oxygen supply and nutrients to the baby, couldn't flow to my uterus. APAS has no cure, but my doctor said that my next baby had a big chance of survival with proper treatment. She advised me though that I had to prepare for my next pregnancy emotionally, mentally and financially because the treatment would be long and costly.

A Showcase of Blessings and Miracles

I learned that I was pregnant on May 15, 2012, more than two years after my second miscarriage. I began to worry that my baby might not survive because we couldn't afford the huge expenses related to my pregnancy. I had to inject heparin (a blood thinner) under the skin of my abdomen twice a day for the duration of my pregnancy. A single dose of heparin costs P300. I also needed to undergo monthly laboratory exams, ultrasound and checkups with my doctor. My husband was a simple tricycle driver and I didn't have work. But I felt God telling me not to worry. My



Clarisa with son Nathanael right after his birth.



I pray that you receive your miracles in Jesus' name!

By Bo Sanchez

I pray that God strengthens you through your trials, heals your diseases, blesses your problems, and directs you to the path He wants you to take. I pray that God removes your fears and gives you the courage to surrender your burdens to Him.

So place your hand over my hand, and let's pray with trust, together with our prayer team of intercessors praying for you right now...

This page is our Point of Contact, our spiritual connection.

Say after me...

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Lord, I surrender to You my worries and anxieties. I surrender to You my needs, my problems, my trials. I place them all in Your big hands. And I open myself to all that You want to give to me. On this day, I say yes to Your love, to Your blessings, to Your healing, to Your miracles. And Lord, specifically, I ask for the following miracles for my life...

I believe that You answer my prayer in the best way possible! And I thank You in advance for the perfect answers to my prayers. I also ask for the special intercession of Mama Mary. I pray all this in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen!

SPECIAL INTENTION FOR THIS MONTH:

Bless the readers of *Kerygma*, Lord. It is Advent, and soon it will be Christmas. We are all excited to celebrate Your birthday. Keep us focused on You, dear Jesus, and help us to find the real meaning of Christmas as we grow in age. May we find time to spend with You despite the busyness of the season. Fill our hearts with Your love that we may incarnate You in our own lives. Thank You for coming into our lives. Thank You for Christmas. Amen.

Praying for you,

Email your prayer requests to me at bosanchez@kerygmfamily.com or write to me at Shepherd's Voice Publications, #60 Chicago St., Cubao, Quezon City, Philippines 1109.

